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SUBJECT: (SBU) DANISH PEOPLE'S PARTY MP SPECULATES FM
MOELLER MAY SOON RETIRE

REF: COPENHAGEN 435

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. MP Soren Espersen, Danish People's Party (DPP) foreign policy spokesman, told Poloffs Foreign Minister Per Stig Moeller may retire soon in favor of rising Conservative party star Connie Hedegaard, Minister for Climate and Energy. Espersen's party supports the Liberal-Conservative coalition government from the outside. Espersen shared the widely-held view that PM Lars Loekke Rasmussen will reshuffle the cabinet after COP-15 to make the government clearly his own (he inherited it when his predecessor Anders Fogh Rasmussen became NATO Secretary General). Espersen expected the PM not to call a referendum this parliamentary term on ending Denmark's EU "opt-outs" (justice/home affairs, monetary and defense policy), despite his party's campaign promise to do so. Espersen noted that public support for Danish forces' service in Afghanistan remains surprisingly strong and cuts across the political spectrum. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On October 20, Danish People's Party (DPP) MP and foreign policy spokesman Soren Espersen met with Poloffs and Pol Specialist and discussed a wide range of issues. The DPP supports the Government (a coalition of the Liberals and Conservatives) from the outside, providing a reliable and indispensable bloc of 25 votes. Espersen said he shared the widely-held view that PM Lars Loekke Rasmussen will reshuffle the cabinet after COP-15, i.e. some time in early 2010, in order to put his own stamp on the Government he inherited without an election in April, when his predecessor Anders Fogh Rasmussen became Secretary General of NATO. Unlike most political observers here, Espersen believes FM Per Stig Moeller (in office since 2001) is so tired he is ready to step down from national politics, in favor of his fellow Conservative, Climate and Energy Minister Connie Hedegaard. This was just Espersen's private view, based on personal observation; Moeller had complained of having had no summer vacation at all. Espersen acknowledged that if rumors concerning Hedegaard heading to Brussels as Denmark's new EU Commissioner are true, Moeller might prefer to stay on. (COMMENT: We pass along Espersen's remarks, but note that Moeller himself has said Hedegaard would make a great EU Commissioner; that prompted speculation that Moeller was keen to stay on. END COMMENT.)

¶3. (SBU) Despite his strong support for PM Rasmussen's programs, particularly strengthening of the country's immigration standards -- a DPP core principle -- Espersen assessed that the Prime Minister was not maintaining party discipline as well as his predecessor, because he does not

like confrontation. That said, Espersen feels the Danish electorate, even if they prefer other parties in next month's local elections, will return the current Government to power in the next national contest.

¶4. (SBU) Espersen predicted the Lisbon Treaty would soon come into force, but insisted Denmark would maintain its long-standing "opt-outs" in monetary, justice/home affairs and defense policy (a fourth, on citizenship, has been overtaken by events). He had been mystified by then-PM Fogh's public promise to hold a referendum this parliamentary term on the opt-outs, and did not believe Loekke would act on it before the parliamentary election. The country did not currently meet the criteria for joining the euro, and the timing was wrong: a referendum should come shortly after parliamentary elections, not before. No PM should call a referendum without being sure of success. Espersen claimed the Danish electorate would react emotionally against the idea of allowing Brussels to control the country's immigration and asylum laws.

¶5. (SBU) On Afghanistan, Espersen observed that Danish public support remains strong and has actually increased over the past year. He found this remarkable considering the high casualty rate (27 fatalities).

¶6. (SBU) Espersen criticized the ruling coalition's decision earlier this year to allow the Socialist People's Party (SPP) to join the Five-Year Defense Agreement. He predicted the SPP, which had never signed up to such an agreement before, would use its seat at the table to cause trouble on a wide range of defense issues, from the upcoming fighter aircraft selection to the appointment of senior

defense officials. As evidence, Espersen noted that the SPP joined the main opposition party SDP's call for Defense Minister Soeren Gade's resignation (reftel).

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